

Our Lady of Fatima



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By:

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Part I.

Apparitions at Fatima

In centuries past, the barren uplands around the little village of Fatima, which is one hundred miles by road north of Lisbon, had seen several of the great battles in which Portugal had won its freedom from the tyranny of the Moors and the overlordship of the Spanish. Those conflicts had long passed and had been forgotten, while scarcely an echo of the Great War then devastating half Europe had reached the ears of the simple peasant folk eking out a precarious livelihood from the poor soil of these hills, in the year 1917.

The Three Children

On May 13, 1917, three peasant children of that countryside were driving their little flock of sheep to pasture. They passed the few houses of the village, and, after some questioning among themselves, they chose to go along the northern road to the field that was owned by Lucia dos Santos, the father of one of them. Lucia was the eldest of the party. She was ten years of age, and with her were her two cousins, Jacinta and Francisco Marto. Jacinta, the youngest, was seven. Like Lucia, she was barefooted and dressed in poor clothing of the peasantry, with long skirts, and a shawl thrown over her head. Francisco, the man of the party, was a sturdy lad of nine, with long trousers, short jacket, and a woolen cap. He carried his horn slung over his shoulder, and his staff in his hand.

Cova da Iria

The pasture the children chose for that day was a shallow depression, on which there was little grass among the many outcrops of stone, and nothing to relieve the eye except a few scattered groups of olives and evergreen oaks. The children walked slowly behind their browsing sheep. Their field was called Cova da Iria. About midday, they sat down and ate their own poor lunch. Then, according to the custom of the district, they set about the recitation of their daily Rosary. Like many other children, they found the Rosary a long prayer, but they had struck upon an easy method of shortening it. They simply said, "Our Father" and no more on the large beads, and, "Hail Mary" for the smaller ones. They were soon free to play, and, at Francisco's suggestion, they were busy on the far side of the field building a house with some of the loose stones lying around.

The First Apparition

Suddenly there was a vivid flash of lightning. It came from the clear blue sky. At once, the children stopped their play, for sudden thunderstorms sometimes swept this district killing the sheep on the exposed fields. They ran to gather their sheep and drive them home quickly, but they were stopped by yet another vivid lightning flash. Terrified, they looked about them. To their amazement they saw to their right a Lady of the greatest beauty standing, it seemed, upon one of the low oak trees. She appeared to be a girl of fifteen or sixteen, and was clothed in a long white garment with a white mantle over her hair, and this mantle was edged with a brighter light. She had a golden cord ending in a ball about her neck. Her beautiful face was serious and rather sad. Her hands were joined before her breast and a rosary of white brilliant beads hung from her right hand. Her feet were partly hidden by the bright cloud that rested upon the tree.

Naturally, the children were astonished and afraid. The Lady spoke to them kindly, saying, "Have no fear. I will do you no harm." Reassured by her gentleness and the sweetness of her voice, the children came a little closer. Then Lucia, the eldest, spoke, "Who are you?" she asked. "Where did you come from? What do you want?"

The Lady replied, "I come from heaven! I want you children to come here at this hour, on the 13th of each month, until October. Then I will tell you who I am."

"You come from heaven! Shall I go there?" asked Lucia.

"Yes," was the Lady's reply, "but you must say the Rosary, and say it properly."

"And Jacinta?"

"She will go, too."

"And Francisco?"

"Yes, but he must say many Rosaries."

Lucia made an enquiry about some little friends who had died and the Lady answered her.

Now, the Lady, in her turn, asked, "Are you willing to offer yourselves to God, and to bear all the sufferings He wishes to send you in reparation for the sins whereby He is offended, and as intercession for the conversion of sinners, and to make amends for all the blasphemies and offences committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary?"

Lucia, answering in the name of all three, expressed their willingness. The Lady added, "You will have much to suffer then, but the grace of God will help you and give you the strength you need."

Some moments later, the Lady recommended they recite the Rosary devoutly every day to obtain peace for the world. Then she moved slowly towards the east and heavenwards, and disappeared in the blue vault of the sky. Lucia afterwards explained that all this had happened in the space of about ten minutes.

The Sequel

When the Lady had disappeared, the children were left looking at one another in astonishment. They could scarcely believe that it had not been all a dream. But, all three had seen her. Francisco had not heard what she had said, but both the girls had caught every word. And Lucia had spoken to her! They got their sheep together and began to move back along the road for home. On the way, they decided among themselves not to tell anyone of this strange experience. However, the excitement of it all was too much for little Jacinta. That very evening as soon as she met her mother she sought to share the joyful news with her. Her mother questioned her and got the whole story from her. The next day she told Lucia's parents. Soon it was the common gossip of the village.

Opposition

The news was not received kindly by anyone. Everyone was incredulous except the children. Their parents particularly were determined that there should be no further nonsense of that sort. The three children were forbidden to tell such stories or to return to the field of Cova da Iria. However, Lucia was insistent that she must go back to the Lady at Cova on June 13, as she had promised. In desperation, her mother brought her to the parish priest and charged her, "Confess your lie so that the parish priest may tell the people on Sunday, and put an end to the whole affair." Lucia still persisted saying, "But, mother mine, how can I say that I did not see what I saw?" The other children were brought along, too. Their pastor was kind to them, but deferred any decision until further evidence was available. While it might be some heavenly visitation, it was possible that it might be a deceit of the devil. Only time would tell. The many arguments and discussions that arose upset Lucia very much, and in the end, on June 12, she told the other children that she would not go with them to the field on the following day. They declared bravely that they were going, since they had promised the Lady. The following morning, June 13, Lucia went across to her cousins' house and found them praying and crying. "Are you not going to Cova?" she asked them.

"We are afraid to go without you," was their reply. "Come, then, I am going!"

The Second Apparition

On June 13, 1917, even though it was marked by special festivities in the village as it was the feast of its patron, Saint Anthony, the children were not alone in the field of Cova. Lucia's father had gone ahead of the children, anxious no doubt, about the strange trespasser on his land. He was accompanied by sixty or seventy others who had come along out of curiosity. Again, it was midday and the children, dressed in their best for the village feast, knelt in the shade of a large oak and recited the Rosary devoutly with the people. After the Rosary, the crowd noticed Lucia arrange her shawl over her head, "as if going into church" and turn towards the east. With a gesture of surprise, she cried out, "Look, that was a flash of lightning. The Lady is coming." She rose and ran down to the smaller tree where the Lady had appeared the first time. "Madame," said Lucia, "you have made me come here, what do you want of me?"

Again, the Lady urged the daily recitation of the Rosary, and added, "I want you to learn to read, that I may be able to tell you what I want." Continuing, she confided to Lucia the first secret message, which the child guarded faithfully. In reply to her request to take them all with her to heaven, the Lady said she would take Jacinta and Francis soon, but Lucia would have to remain longer on earth. "Jesus wishes to use you in making me known and loved. He wishes to spread in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart."

"Then I shall have to remain alone?" the child asked sadly.

"No, my child . . . I shall never abandon you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way which shall bring you to God."

As the Lady spoke these last words, she seemed to be surrounded by a still brighter light than before. In this light, as the Lady opened her hands in a parting gesture, the children saw a vision of a heart surrounded with thorns.* That was the end of the second vision. The sixty witnesses had not seen the Lady.

Those nearest the tree had heard Lucia's conversation distinctly, and the Lady's words, not clearly, but faintly, like the buzzing of a bee. They all had remarked that the bright mid-summer sun had been dimmed in some mysterious fashion for the ten minutes of Lucia's vision. When they went up to the tree afterwards, out of curiosity, they noticed another strange thing. The upper branches were all bent over towards the east, as if the Lady's garment had trailed over them as she went away.

* Later, the children understood that this was the Immaculate Heart of Mary, wounded by the sins of the world.

The Third Apparition

Naturally, news of these strange doings in the field of Cova spread rapidly over the countryside. When the children came back on July 13, some five thousand country residents had gathered to witness what they could. Again, the apparition came, and the Lady urged again the recitation of the Rosary for the ending of the war. On this occasion, after giving the children a glimpse of the horror of hell, Our Lady confided to Lucia a secret that she was not to reveal to anyone until such time as Our Lady herself would see fit. With her heavenly mother's permission, Lucia gave this special message to the world when the clouds of the second world conflict were gathering, just twenty-one years later. It was contained in a letter she addressed to the Bishop of Leiria. In the course of this message Our Lady forewarned Lucia that, "the world, because of its many crimes, will soon be chastised by war, famine, and persecution against the Church and the Holy Father. To prevent it, I ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart and for Communion of Reparation on the first Saturday of each month. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted and there shall be peace. Otherwise, impious propaganda will spread its errors through the world raising up wars and persecutions against the Church. Many will be martyred, the Holy Father will have much to suffer, and several nations shall be wiped out. . . . The horizon is gloomy but here is a ray of hope—my Immaculate Heart shall triumph in the end." *

At the conclusion of this vision, the Lady added, "When reciting the Rosary say after each decade, "Oh my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fire of hell, and lead all souls to heaven, especially those most in need of Thy mercy."

On this day, Lucia, for the second time, asked the Lady to tell them who she was, stating many did not believe. The Lady's reply was that the children were to come each month as promised, and that in October she would tell them her name, and work a great miracle that would convince all. Again, most of the crowd present neither heard nor saw anything, but some of those near the children said that they had heard what Lucia had said. On this occasion, and others, many people declared that they saw a light cloud, like the smoke of incense, surrounding the tree and the children.

* Pope Pius XII fulfilled the request for the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in October 1942.

Formal approval of the practice of a series of five Communions of Reparation on the first Saturday of consecutive months, together with the devout recitation of the Rosary and meditation for fifteen minutes on its mysteries was given by the Bishop of Leiria on September 13, 1939.

Widespread Questioning and Growing Opposition

Before the next month had passed, the news of these events had spread far and wide throughout Portugal. The secular press was particularly hostile and bitter in its attacks upon the apparitions at Fatima. They were denounced as frauds perpetrated by the priests to establish a Portuguese Lourdes—a miracle and money factory.

Others were content to dismiss them as nothing more than delusions in the minds of the children. The Catholic Press did not defend them. It treated the whole controversy with marked reserve. The Government disapproved strongly of the whole business, and viewed it with alarm. At the time, Portugal was controlled by the violently irreligious, liberal, anti-clerical party that had brought about the revolution of 1910, dethroned the king, and striven to deny God His right to the loyalty and service of the Portuguese people.

The civil administrator of the district of Fatima lived at Ourem and was animated by a particularly bitter hatred of religion. After the gathering at Cova on July 13, he summoned the children and their parents to appear before him. While the father of the two younger ones, Francisco and Jacinta, went himself, he refused to take his children with him, as he claimed they were too young. However, Lucia appeared with her father. The administrator tried to get her to reveal the secret and to promise never to return to the field of Cova again. She was unmoved by his promises and by the threats that followed them.

August 13, 1917: Disappointment

On the morning of August 13, the administrator went to the Marto home and saw the children there. After some argument with Lucia's father, this official finally persuaded the three children to get into his car, saying that he would drive them to Cova. However, he immediately drove off with them in the opposite direction, towards his own residence at Ourem. When Lucia protested, he told her that he was taking them to the parish priest at Ourem, and that, with his car, he would still have time to bring them to Cova. However, on arrival at Ourem, he locked them in a room and detained them there for three days, declaring that he would not free them until they revealed the secret. Promises were followed by terrifying threats. Jacinta, the youngest was especially lonely and terrified. She was yearning for her mother. "Don't cry," her brother said, trying to pacify her, "Let us offer all this to Jesus for sinners." To his offering for their trials for the love of God and for the conversion of sinners, Jacinta added, "Also for the Holy Father and in reparation for sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

These three unlettered children remained unmoved in the face of every interrogation and argument. Whether taken together or separately, they always answered in the same way and maintained the reality of what they had seen or heard, without contradiction worthy of note. Little Jacinta was sometimes puzzled and confused when pressed for details. Francisco had not noticed many details during the appearances. Lucia was always clear and definite about every detail of the Lady's appearance and dress.

Meanwhile, some thousands of people had gathered at Cova da Iria awaiting the children and their vision. Twelve o'clock came and passed, but no children arrived. For a moment, a small white cloud seemed to rest on the tree, but it quickly disappeared. The suspense was broken some time later by the arrival of a boy from the village, which was a good mile away, with the message that the children had been arrested by the administrator, and taken to Ourem. The crowd was furious. Many of its members rushed back to Fatima and made a noisy demonstration outside the presbytery. They believed their parish priest had a hand in the kidnapping of the children. They were in a mood for murder. The more stable members of the crowd shared the tranquil confidence of Lucia's mother, who, when she was informed of the administrator's action, was reported to have said, "It's all right. If they are liars, they deserve it. If they aren't, Our Lady will protect them."

The Fourth Apparition

The administrator, not making any headway with the children, finally released them on August 18. The Lady appeared to them the next day when they were pasturing their sheep. On this occasion, they were not at Cova da Iria, but in the field of Valinhos, close to the village of Fatima. She complained of the ill-treatment they had suffered. She told them that, as a consequence, the miracle promised for October would not be on such a grand scale. In reply to Lucy's question regarding offerings that had been left at the Cova, the Lady said that they were to make two litters by which Our Lady of the Rosary would be greatly honoured.* Once again there was an exhortation to prayer and penance:

"Pray, pray very much. Make sacrifices for sinners.
Remember that many souls are lost because there is nobody to pray
and to make sacrifices for them."

* This request was faithfully carried out. At pilgrimages on the 13th of each month, the statue of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima is carried through the crowds with great honor (see cover photograph). A second statue is borne around the world and received with great devotion in the international Pilgrimage of Our Lady of Fatima.

The Fifth Apparition

As the weeks passed, the news of the happenings at Fatima had spread further and further. The official action of the administrator had excited widespread comment. The tide of popular feeling was running strongly in favor of the supernatural character of the apparitions. When midday approached on September 13, it was calculated that the crowd gathered at Cova numbered more than twenty-five thousand. A wave of emotion swept over the crowd when Lucia, kneeling expectantly near the tree of the apparitions, told them to kneel and pray. In a few moments she cried, "She is coming!"

While the crowd did not see the vision, many of them, of different ages and education, declared that they saw a globe of light coming from the east to the west in the clear sky. The apparition again lasted about ten minutes. The Lady asked the children to continue saying the Rosary for the ending of the war. She urged them to come without fail on October 13, and promised that on that day she would appear, accompanied by Saint Joseph and the Child Jesus. At the end, Lucia cried aloud, "She is going away now." At the same moment, a little child in the crowd exclaimed, "There it is again!" pointing to the luminous globe that crossed the sky slowly and disappeared.

The Sixth Apparition

When October 13 came around, Fatima and the events there were being discussed all over Portugal. Everyone who could possibly make it, traveled to the little village. They arrived expecting either to see the end of the events by failure of the promised miracle to appear, or to be a witness to a special intervention from God. While many good people were nervous and anxious, the children were steadfast in their confidence that the Lady would not disappoint them. Before dark on the evening of October 12, a great crowd had already arrived at Cova. In spite of a continuous drizzle of rain, the crowd grew through the night. As noon approached on the next day, October 13, the number present was estimated at about seventy thousand people. The children came along just before midday. About noon, they began to say their Rosary, as was their custom. Suddenly Lucia cried out, "She is coming. Kneel down everybody." Her mother, too, spoke up, "Take a good look, child. Don't make any mistake." There was no mistake. While the people, for the moment, neither saw nor heard anything, the children saw their beautiful Lady more radiant and beautiful than ever. Francisco said her face was brighter than the sun. Lucia, for her part, recalling the Lady's promise that she would tell them who she was on this occasion, asked once more, "Who are you, and what do you want?"

The Message of Fatima

“I AM THE LADY OF THE ROSARY, AND I HAVE COME TO WARN THE FAITHFUL TO AMEND THEIR LIVES AND TO ASK PARDON FOR THEIR SINS. THEY MUST NOT CONTINUE TO OFFEND OUR LORD—ALREADY SO DEEPLY OFFENDED. THEY MUST SAY THE ROSARY.”



International Pilgrim Statue of Our Lady of Fatima
(Photo found on Shrine of Saint Jude Website.)

She added that she wished a chapel to be built in the Cova to the honor of the Lady of the Rosary, and that, if people but amend their lives, the war would end soon. Then Our Lady fulfilled her promise to the children that she would bring with her Saint Joseph and the Divine Child. First, they saw Saint Joseph with Our Lord as a child in his arms standing beside Our Lady. Second, Our Lord appeared to them as a grown man blessing the people with Our Lady at His side garbed as the Mother of Sorrows. Finally, Lucia saw Our Lady in a strange brown dress—the habit of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.* As Our Lady was about to go away, she made a movement with her hand towards the sky. Lucia, following the gesture, cried out, “Look at the sun!”

* It is now generally understood that in this triple vision Our Lady would impress more deeply on our minds the title of Our Lady of the Rosary by recalling in the three successive scenes the three sets of mysteries of the Redemption (Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious) upon which we are to meditate when we say the Rosary.

Part II.

The Miracle of Fatima

Suddenly the drizzle of rain ceased, and the sun shone out overhead. All eyes looked up, and could gaze on the sun without being dazzled. The sun had the appearance of a plaque of dull silver. The next instant it began to revolve, and throw out great shafts of colored light—red, yellow, blue and green—that were reflected from the rain clouds, the hills, the rocks, the earth, and on the faces of the crowd. It seemed as if the sun was a giant wheel, torn from its place in the heavens, and sweeping down upon the earth. Suddenly this spectacle ceased. However, the movement of the sun began a second time. Again, the strange lights were given out; again, the vast crowd was deeply moved with astonishment and fear. Again, the movement of the sun ceased. However, after a few moments it was repeated a third and last time. As this heavenly manifestation persisted, great numbers present had been moved to fear some imminent judgment, and had fallen on their knees to pray, making the act of contrition aloud. Just as suddenly as it had begun, this spectacle of the “dancing” sun passed. It had lasted about twelve minutes. It was witnessed by every one of the tens of thousands present, as well as others over twenty-five miles away. Accounts of it appeared in the press all over Portugal.

The Children of Fatima

Following the extraordinary events in Cova da Iria, the three children to whom Our Lady had appeared, Francisco, Jacinta, and Lucia, were subjected to much embarrassment from the curiosity and, at times, hostility of those about them. Naturally, they sought strength and consolation in each other’s company, when they often recalled together the great moments of their heavenly favors. They themselves took Our Lady’s messages very much to heart. While still remaining children and enjoying childish games and pastimes, they had many serious conferences together. Thus, they determined to comply with Our Lady’s request for sacrifices for the conversion of sinners. They became most devout in reciting the Rosary themselves and had the custom of the family Rosary established in their own homes. They often gave up all or part of their lunches, feeding poor children with them. They undertook practices of penance. However, they did not remain together for long. Francisco and Jacinta Marto were victims of the terrible epidemic of influenza that swept over Europe after the war of 1914 through 1918.



Lúcia Santos, Jacinta and Francisco Marto (1917)

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This applies to Australia, the European Union, and countries with a
copyright term of life of the author plus 70 years.)*

Francisco

Francisco fell ill in December 1918. After two weeks in bed, he appeared sufficiently recovered to get up. After a time, he paid one more visit to the field of Cova. It was his last, for he had a relapse. When the parish priest was called, he found the boy very ill. He hastened to finish his instructions for First Communion. The child was overjoyed when his pastor brought Our Lord to him on April 3, 1919. It was his first and last Communion, for he died the next day. He had not reached his eleventh birthday.

Jacinta

When Francisco was, dying Jacinta lay ill in the next room. Hearing that her brother could not live much longer, Jacinta sent him a message saying, "Give my loving thoughts to Our Lord and to Our Lady. Tell them that I am ready to suffer all that they wish, in order to convert sinners and to make reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary." Both she and Lucia were deeply moved at Francisco's death. Her own illness ran a longer and more painful course. She had to be removed from her home to the hospital at Ourem but, after two months, she was brought back, no better. While ill at home, she sent for Lucia and confided to her that Our Lady had come to her again and had told her that she would join Francisco in heaven soon, but that she would have to go to hospital again and suffer much. She was to offer her sufferings for the conversion of sinners, in reparation for sins against the Immaculate Heart of Mary and for the love of Jesus.

It happened that a Lisbon specialist, who came to Fatima soon afterwards, saw the sick child and suggested that she be brought to the capital for an operation. This was done, but it left her in great pain. She told a poor woman of the city who visited her that Our Lady had come to her once more and told her the day and the hour of her death. Four days later, she asked for the last Sacraments. The parish priest heard her confession, but, in spite of her insistence, did not give her Holy Viaticum, as he did not consider that she was in danger of death that night. Within three hours, she was dead. It was February 20, 1920. Jacinta was ten years old.

Their Grave

The bodies of these two children, brother and sister, who saw Our Lady at Fatima were buried side by side in the special tomb prepared for them by the Bishop of Leiria in the little cemetery of Fatima.* Their epitaph reads: "Here rest the mortal remains of Francisco and Jacinta, To whom Our Lady appeared."

* In April 1951, their remains were removed to the church built above the Cova.

Their immortal souls must surely be sharing the eternal bliss of the saints, with Mary their Mother, in the beatific vision.

Lucia

Lucia, the eldest of the three children who received Our Lady's favors at Fatima, had most to suffer. She was subjected to constant questioning wherever she went. At home, her mother had little sympathy for her. In the village, in church, at the school to which she went to learn to read as Our Lady had asked her, people stared, pointed at her, and whispered about her. Her one consolation was the company of Jacinta and Francisco, but, as we have seen, this was soon taken from her. Then, for her own sake, it was decided that she must leave Fatima. On June 16, 1921, the year after Jacinta's death, she made her final visit to all that was dear to her—the church, the field of Cova, her homestead and its sheep. After a few hours sleep that night, she rose before dawn and quietly left Fatima. She was accompanied by her mother and a friend. At Leiria, she said good-bye to them. It was the end of her childhood.

She went to a school for girls, the Asilo de Vilar, at Porto, which was conducted by the Sisters of Saint Dorothy. There, she was not to tell anyone who she was, or whence she had come. She was forbidden to speak of the visions at Fatima. She was given a new name, Maria des Dolores (Mary of Dolours). Her school days were hard and full of trials, but she gradually came to understand her vocation.

In October 1926, she left her native land and entered the novitiate of the Sisters of Saint Dorothy, at Tuy, Spain. She was clothed with the habit of that institute, and on October 3, 1934, made her final profession. Her name in religion linked her old and new life. It was Mary Lucia of Dolours. She returned to Fatima one time after leaving home in 1921. It was a week after the solemn ceremonies marking the pilgrimage of thanksgiving, May 20, 1946. Once more, she visited her old home and that of her cousins. Once more, she retraced her journeys over the Serra and verified the places of Our Lady's visits. Her final visit was to the grave of Jacinta and Francisco. She then returned to her convent.

Soon after, her long-standing desire was granted. She entered the Carmelite Convent at Coimbra, Portugal, some sixty-two miles from Fatima. Her new name as a Carmelite was Sister Lucia of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

So Lucia, who not only saw Our Lady at Fatima, but also spoke to her, lived the hidden and humble life of an enclosed contemplative, and disappeared from the sight and notice of the world.

Part III.

The Shrine of Fatima

While the simple faithful, impressed by the miracle of October 13, 1917, accepted the reality of the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima and began to make pious pilgrimages to the field of Cova da Iria, the enemies of religion were moved to fury by them. Within a fortnight, they held a burlesque procession of Our Lady at Santarem, the capital of the district. The local authorities, far from preventing them, gave them every encouragement. The secular press carried on a campaign of ridicule against the reborn devotion of the people to Our Lady of the Rosary. Many good people, while revolted by the ridicule and scoffing of the unbelievers, were hesitant about the whole affair. Many, nevertheless, came to the Cova on pilgrimages. Pious hands soon erected a rough chapel over the place of the apparitions. As the months went by, the numbers of pilgrims to Fatima multiplied, in spite of many obstacles placed in their way by the government officials. The opposition reached its climax on March 6, 1922, when the chapel was blown up with dynamite. A curious fact recorded by a recent authority is that, the bomb that was meant to destroy the remains of the tree of the apparitions was the only one that failed to explode.

The Real Beginning

Far from ending devout Catholics' devotion to Our Lady of Fatima, this outrage only fanned it to greater fervor. The next week the parish priest of Fatima led a pilgrimage of reparation from his church to the field and offered Mass there in the open, near the ruins of the chapel. On May 13 following, there came what was really a spontaneous national pilgrimage of 50,000 people from every part of Portugal. October 13, the same year, saw another gathering of many thousands. Similarly, on May 13, and October 13, 1923, there were great pilgrimages to Fatima. The civil authorities did all they could to prevent these gatherings, but in vain.

Attitude of the Church

As we have already seen, the parish priest of Fatima was slow to move in the matter of the reports of the strange happenings at the field of Cova da Iria. He went to the field for the first time for the last apparition and miracle on October 13, 1917. He immediately brought the whole matter officially to the notice of Church authorities at Lisbon. Then, he was instructed by his superiors to make a careful investigation into the facts and collect all evidence available. He was given the assistance of a neighboring pastor in this

work. While the latter completed his report in two weeks, it was not until eighteen months later, in April 1919, that the local parish priest, prudently waiting for the first excitement to subside, submitted his report.

Only after the bomb outrage of March 1922, did the Bishop of the diocese of Leiria, in which the parish of Fatima was included when this diocese was reconstructed in January 1918, take any official action. In May 1922, he set up a Commission to make a thorough enquiry and to sift all the evidence both for and against the supernatural character of the events of Fatima in 1917. After eight years, this Commission completed its report, and finally submitted it to the Bishop on April 14, 1930. It was not until he had given it further consideration for six months that finally he gave official canonical recognition to the devotion of Our Lady of the Rosary at Fatima. In a magnificent Pastoral Letter upon the visions at Fatima, he gave his formal verdict in these words:

“In consideration of the facts we have set forth and having heard the reverend consultors of our diocese, humbly invoking the Holy Spirit of God and relying upon the protection of most holy Mary, We deem well:

To declare worthy of credence, the visions of the children at Cova da Iria, in the parish of Fatima of this diocese, on the thirteenth day of the months from May to October 1917; to give official permission for the cult of Our Lady of Fatima.”

Growth of Popular Devotion

Long before this official recognition of the reality of the visions at Fatima, the Catholic people of Portugal began a series of pilgrimages to Fatima, which are now a feature of their national life. Special reference should be made to the great occasion of May 13, 1938. The Bishops of the country had made their annual retreat together at Fatima. On this day, they rededicated their several dioceses to Mary Queen of Heaven and Mediatrix of all graces, and formally thanked her for her special protection of their country in the two preceding years, in which war had reached its very borders, but had not touched it. Nearly half a million people were present on this great occasion. Fifty altars were erected for the celebration of Mass by the hundreds of priests present and over 65,000 people received Holy Communion. During the years afterwards, there were steadily increasing pilgrimages to Fatima and popular interest and devotion was aroused throughout the world by the publication of many accounts of favors granted by Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima.

The Miraculous Spring

A cause of anxiety to the authorities when they discovered the increasing numbers of pilgrims to the Cova was the lack of water. No spring was known to exist within a radius of several miles. However, in 1926, a beginning was made to dig a dam in the centre of the depression to store rainwater. Those digging soon came upon rock. When they began to blast it away, water gushed up. It has never failed since. It is now collected in a vast concrete cistern underground and serves the needs of multitudes of pilgrims, and is said to have been a source of healing to the sick.

In 1942, the silver jubilee of the apparitions of Our Lady to the children at Fatima was marked by a series of widespread and fervent religious celebrations. The celebrations began in March and ended on October 31, with the historic broadcast by his Holiness Pope Pius XII, in which he bade the people of Portugal to place all their confidence in Mary and reminded them of their great debt of gratitude to her.

The Lesson of Fatima

“I AM THE LADY OF THE ROSARY. I HAVE COME TO WARN THE FAITHFUL TO AMEND THEIR LIVES AND TO ASK PARDON FOR THEIR SINS. THEY MUST NOT CONTINUE TO OFFEND OUR LORD—ALREADY SO DEEPLY OFFENDED. THEY MUST SAY THE ROSARY.”

These words of Our Lady addressed to the children of Fatima should ring throughout the whole world.

We should Endeavour to lead lives of more generous service of God. We must detach our hearts from this world of passing things by penance and self-denial, and raise them to God in prayer.

Since, “all the benefits the Redeemer merited for us are distributed by Mary His Mother, on whose recommendation Her Son, with full accord, pours forth His gifts,” it is fitting that we should approach the throne of grace through Mary. In the recitation of the Rosary, we meditate with Mary upon the mysteries of our redemption. This is the reason why the Rosary, well said, has been a source of grace to countless souls of every grade in the Church for centuries. This too, is the reason why Our Lady herself insisted upon its recitation.

Lucia, Jacinta, and Francisco took this lesson to heart. May this brief account of Fatima and its message be the means by which others not only may learn of the wonderful events that took place there, but also be led by Our Lady, as the three children were, to a more perfect service of her Divine Son.



Lúcia Santos, Jacinta and Francisco Marto (1917)

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Appendix

Apparitions of the Angel

It was not until 25 years after the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima that ecclesiastical authority permitted publication of the fact that the three children to whom Our Lady appeared had been previously favored with visions of an angel. Lucia, at the time, was eight, and had never learned to read and had but the vaguest idea of time and dates. It was in the summer of 1916, when the three children had the first of the supernatural favors that were to prepare them for some more wonderful things in the following year.

They were pasturing their sheep in a field belonging to the Santos family, not far from the home of Francisco and Jacinta. The time, about midday, when having finished their lunch and their abbreviated midday Rosary, they saw the figure, as it were, of a youth, about fourteen or fifteen, that was dazzling bright like clear crystal in the sunlight.

His greeting reassured them, “Do not be afraid, I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me.” He knelt, and then bowing his forehead to the ground said:

“My God, I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love Thee! I beg pardon for those who do not believe, nor adore, nor hope, nor love Thee.”

Moved by grace, the children imitated him, and his words burnt themselves into their memories. When away, unobserved, minding their sheep on the lonely hillsides they often repeated this form of prayer.

A Second Visit

Some months later, the same heavenly visitor came a second time. The children were in Lucy's garden, near the well. This time he told them that, “the holy hearts of Jesus and Mary have plans of mercy in regard to you.” He instructed them to, “continually offer up prayers and sacrifices.”

A Mysterious Communion

On the third great occasion, in late September or early October, 1916, this heavenly visitor appeared once more to the children at the foot of the Cabeco hill, the scene of his first coming. They had been repeating the prayer he taught them when once more he stood before them with a chalice in his hands and above it appeared a Host from which drops of blood were flowing. While the chalice remained mysteriously suspended in the air, the Angel knelt beside the children and repeated three times with them this prayer of adoration, offering, and reparation.

“O Most holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I adore You with my whole heart and I offer You the most precious Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for all the outrages by which He is offended. By the infinite merit of His Most Sacred Heart, through the intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I pray for the conversion of poor sinners.”

He then gave the Host to Lucia and the contents of the chalice to Francisco and Jacinta with the words, “Receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, which is horribly outraged by ungrateful men! Repair their sins and console your God.”

Declaration

In accordance with the decree of Urban VIII, we declare that in speaking of the events, prodigies, and miracles of Fatima, we wish to speak of them in the sense in which Ecclesiastical Authority approved them on October 13, 1930, without desiring in any way to anticipate a decision of the Holy See.

Nihil Obstat:

P. Jones, Censor Deputatus

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